

DRAFT LETTER

Re: Boards and Commissions Transition Task Force

Dear Mayor Leffingwell, Mayor Pro Tem Cole and Councilmembers:

We are writing to express our concerns with the recommendation of the Boards and Commissions Transition Task Force to eliminate the Downtown Commission.

The Mission of the Downtown Commission includes the following:

- (1) advise the city council and city staff regarding policies and projects impacting downtown Austin;
- (2) serve as stewards for the Downtown Austin Plan, and, as such:
 - a. serve as a sounding board for the city council and staff on the implementation of the Downtown Austin Plan; and
 - b. offer recommendations on amendments to the Downtown Austin Plan as needed.

We believe these roles cannot be performed adequately by another commission and offer the following specific points:

1. The task force proposes shifting the work of the Downtown Commission over to the Planning Commission. Shifting the Downtown Commission's responsibilities to the Planning Commission will inevitably dilute the time consuming and extensive efforts that are needed to implement the Downtown Austin Plan. The Planning Commissioners already face a very heavy workload. It is hard to see how they could take on the proactive initiatives that the Downtown Commission has been working on in our role of stewards for the Downtown Austin Plan, such as our recent work on activating downtown alleys (e.g., the 20 wide alley project and alley activation next steps), increasing public open space downtown, and facilitating improvements to the Rainey neighborhood. We have concerns that downtown will not get the attention it deserves, as the economic engine of our community and heart of our city, if our workload is shifted to an already busy Planning Commission.
2. Shifting the work of the Downtown Commission over to the Planning Commission is also problematic given the different focuses of the two commissions. The implementation of the Downtown Austin Plan is crucial and about much more than land planning—it extends to the many areas represented by our diverse membership, from the arts and music, to transportation and parks and open space.

3. One of the goals of the Task Force was to break down silos. A unique aspect of the Downtown Commission is that it furthers this goal of breaking down silos. We have representatives from many different backgrounds including designated representatives from the Parks and Recreation Board, the Music Commission, the Arts Commission, the Historic Landmark Commission, the Planning Commission, the Urban Transportation Commission, and the Downtown Austin Community Court Advisory Committee. As a result, in tackling issues such as implementation of the Downtown Austin Plan, we are able to do so in a manner that breaks down silos and bridges communications across different stakeholder groups. Shifting the work of the Downtown Commission over to the Planning Commission will do nothing to break down silos.

With a primary mission of serving as stewards of the Downtown Austin Plan, the Downtown Commissioners are taking a leadership role in leading the city towards implementing the many complex parts of the plan, from enhancing access to public open spaces, to making downtown more family-friendly, to creating greater pedestrian mobility. We hope you will continue to entrust the Downtown Commission to provide this service to the City of Austin.

Sincerely,